

The CHARGER

"AHEAD OF THE REST"

VOL. 2, No. 8

CHARGER

AUGUST 1, 1970

I-46 MIX ROCKS AND FRAGS--KILL 53 NVA

1LT Michael Simmons

LZ Hawk Hill** In a rock-throwing, grenade tossing battle west of Tam Ky, Americal Division infantry, artillery and helicopter gunships recently combined to kill 53 NVA.

Companies B and C, 1-46, were conducting search and clear operations in the rugged jungle terrain of Hiep Duc Valley.

"We sent one company to clear the high ground to the north and another to clear the valley floor," said MAJ James M. Hallinan, (Akron, Ohio), operations officer, 1-46.

Co. B moved out to sweep the valley floor in the early morning hours and immediately became involved in what proved to be the biggest firefight of the day.

"We started moving out of our night laager around 5:30 in the morning," said 1LT Drake H. Erby, (Milton, Wis.), 2nd platoon leader. "The 3rd platoon was point, mine was second, and the 1st platoon was drag."

As the company moved across a small grassy opening, the point platoon began receiving rifle and machinegun fire from a treeline to the front. At the same time the 1st platoon, which was still in the night laager waiting for the other platoons to

move across, began receiving heavy mortar and automatic weapons fire.

"We spotted some NVA in the woodline to the north and opened up on them," said SSG Charlie Hall, (Hookertown, N.C.), 1st platoon sergeant. "As we were blasting them, someone also noticed two attempting to sneak up on our perimeter. We threw hand frags and killed them both."

As the 1st platoon continued to fire suppressive fire, the 3rd platoon continued to receive sniper fire and incoming mortar rounds. The 2nd platoon spotted some communication wires on the ground and cut them. The mortar rounds temporarily stopped. The 2nd platoon then moved up to take point and was ordered to secure a defensive position from which an assault on the dug in NVA could be made.

"We dug in faster than I ever imagined it could be done," said Lt. Erby. By this time the 3rd platoon had joined the second -- only the first platoon remained to cross the open area.

Gunships from 71st Assault Helicopter Co. and F Trp., 8th Cav., killed three NVA. Artillery was also pounding the enemy

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53 NVA

position as the 1st platoon began to move from the old night laager.

"We moved out by fire and movement and spotted the bunkers," said SSG Hall. "We had no place to go but forward so that's what we did."

The ensuing battle was a grenade-tossing, bunker to bunker battle, as the infantrymen moved in to destroy the NVA.

As the bitter struggle progressed, the 1st platoon found they had used all their hand grenades. One squad each from the 2nd and 3rd platoons collected all the available grenades and moved to aid the 1st platoon.

With the arrival of reinforcements and more grenades the "Professionals" continued the assault.

"It was a bunker to bunker, hole to hole fight," said Lt. Erby. "We would toss a grenade into a bunker and it would come flying back out. So we resorted to first throwing in a rock to confuse the enemy and then immediately tossing in a grenade. It worked."

The infantrymen finally knocked out the last bunker. In the area search that followed,

they found that there had been a total of 14 heavily fortified bunkers connected by a trenchline. Twenty-nine dead NVA were counted by the Americans.

"Evidently the NVA had planned to ambush as we moved out," said Lt. Erby, "but we moved before they were ready and caught them flatfooted."

Co. B then moved to the high ground and later spotted a large number of NVA in the open. A Firebird from 71st Assault Helicopter Co. was called in and killed 10 of the enemy.

Co. C, clearing the high ground, had received heavy mortar fire the entire morning. However, the men of Co. C continued to support Co. B. As a result four NVA died from Co. C's intense barrage of rifle and machinegun fire.

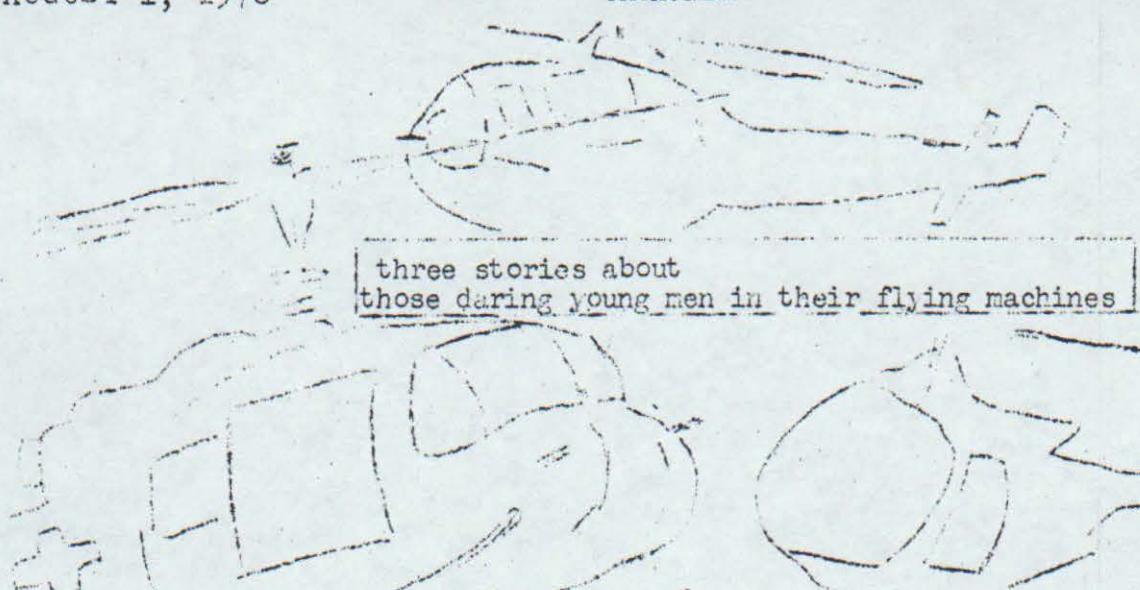
Two days later soldiers of the 6th Reg., 2nd ARVN Div., swept the site of Co. B's contact. The ARVN soldiers found six additional NVA killed by artillery from Btry. C, 3-82.

There were several reasons for the success of the Americal Div. soldiers, but one in particular stood out.

"It was an all-out effort on everyone's part," said Sgt. Dale Phelps, Van Neuys, Calif.), Co. B, 1-46. "It was fantastic how everyone worked together." ***

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three stories about
those daring young men in their flying machines

LOH ROLE INCREASES

Sp5 Richard Merritt

LZ Hawk Hill***They have a rippling buzz that you can't mistake. A Cayuse is about one-third the mass of a Huey UH-1H. Americal Div. pilots and crew members here at the 196th Aviation Section have zipped these small craft into nests of NVA in recent operations, posing a new threat to the enemy.

Never meant to join in heavy combat, these little ships have suddenly found themselves caught in more and more lead filled episodes over Quang Tin Province.

"WE always flew air reconnaissance, cover for convoys and resupply," said WO Dave Marchant (Arlington, Texas), as he discussed the toughness of the LOH. "Now, a lot of routine hops have turned hot."

"It was my first day out," Capt. Ted Brodzinski (Brookhaven, Pa.), commander of the 196th Aviation Section, continued with an example. "The mission sent us over Barrier Island. We were to check out the results of an artillery mission that had previously been fired."

The pilot's bubble of the LOH made a fair target as it skimmed by at 50-foot altitude.

A .30 caliber round smashed through the bubble, cut a hole in the door frame, and exited a half-inch below Brodzinski's hand. "My first day out," repeated Brodzinski.

After that it got hotter.

On an aerial recon a few weeks later, with a PF platoon northwest of Tam Ky, another Brigade LOH zoomed along ahead of the search. Sp4 Bob Nutini (Hancock, Mich.), was the craft's machine-gunner.

"I saw a VC running from the PF," said Nutini, now a Sp5, "and I did him a job. I watched him go down, but we couldn't get in close to check." A spatter of rifle fire flashed up at the chopper, and it withdrew after directing artillery fire on the enemy. "It appeared to be an ambush," said Nutini.

Ambush or no, the crews from Aviation continued to set an unusually brisk fighting pace for an air support unit carrying relatively light arms. Two other gunners killed three NVA in a close-range exchange of fire on hostile Barrier Island. Before long, 10 enemy had fallen to the aviators' guns.

Entering sizzling firefights is a good example of what can happen when LOH crews are flown in all types of operations. While enemy mortar shells whizzed by, Marchant pulled half an exhausted infantry company from a peak west of Tam Ky. A LOH only seats four, including the pilot, but all the bigger ships were tied up. After eleven months in Vietnam, Marchant

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LOH GOES DUST-OFF

SGT Bob Nordyke

LZ Hawk Hill***It was an occasion for field expediency, turning a LOH into a "dust-off" chopper.

During a series of heavy fire-fights in Hiep Duc Valley, two Americal Division pilots flew their small craft into landing zones too small for Huey Medevacs and evacuated more than 15 American soldiers.

CWO Carlos Quintero (Tampa, Fla.), was flying the command and control helicopter for Lt. Col. Richard Carvell (Virginia Beach,

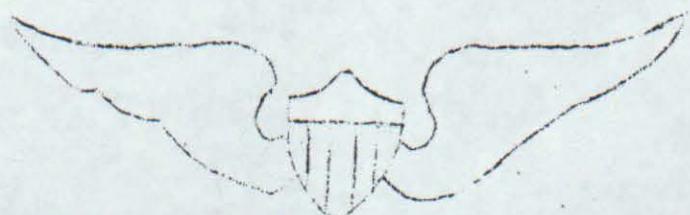
OLD 600

DRIVES ON

SP5 Richard Merritt

LZ Hawk Hill***The beds are unmade and C rations are stacked deep under the bunks. A big green dusty map is stapled in one corner under a light.

A helicopter out in front, patch-welded in several spots where it took hits, is manned by a dust-off crew from the 236th Med. Det., Da Nang. WO James Gregory likes to call it "Lucky Old 600"--the last three tail numbers. "Old 600" has been shot down once since WO Gregory became its commander, but it still



Va.), commanding officer of 1-46, off LZ West, overlooking Hiep Duc Valley, northwest of Tam Ky.

In the valley an infantry company needed help. PFC Kenneth Lyon (Tulsa, Okla.), a crew chief flying his first mission, explained the situation. "We went in seven or eight times to the company. They were set up on a small hill covered with waist-high grass and huge boulders. We picked up three heat casualties and ran some resupply--ammo, cigarettes and food."

In mid-afternoon, the company came under heavy fire from an NVA unit. Two wounded Americans required a "dust-off" medical evacuation helicopter.

"The dust-off couldn't get in," explained Quintero. "The landing zone was too small for the Huey to maneuver into and it was hot--the bird took at least three hits."

Quintero thought the smaller, more maneuverable LOH could get in. It did.

"We went in and they were trying to hit us with everything."

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flies, saving the lives of wounded 196th and South Vietnamese soldiers.

Like many other units, Gregory's crew is on call 24 hours a day.

"We cover areas all the way to Laos." He traced a line on the map that took in their flight area. There are three men in the crew--the pilot, a crew chief and a dust-off medic. "The best medics I've ever seen," insists Mr. Gregory.

When they leave for an emergency run, the crew carries only their personal weapons. They have all the facts about the pick-up, but they must follow closely directions from the ground element. Gregory trained five extra weeks as a chopper pilot, specializing in medical evacuations at Ft. Sam Houston, Tex.

"Last month we went right in on top of the bad guys." Gregory removed about 100 ARVNs in the western Americal Division area, near the beleaguered refugee village of Hiep Duc. "Several runs were made without any smoke

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DUST-OFF

said Quintero, "30 cal., automatic, small arms fire-but no hits."

Hovering three to four feet above the high grass and rocks, Quintero held the chopper steady while Lt. Col. Carvell and PFC Lyon helped the wounded.

"I don't know how he held it," recalled Lyon. "People jumping on and throwing packs--it's hard."

Safely gaining altitude, Quintero extracted the patients to LZ West, and then returned.

This time for another wounded --an NVA. Again he hovered precariously over the tiny LZ, secured the load and returned to the fire support base.

QUINTERO then took the craft up for a final time.

"When we finished getting the people out, we went out to spot NVA and mark their positions for Blue Ghost and Firebird gunships to fire up.

Three days later, another LOH pilot, 1st Lt. Patrick Hadfield (Honolulu), also turned his craft into a medical evacuation chopper in Hiep Duc Valley. Hadfield explained: "I was going out to LZ West to fly the command and control chopper for Lt. Col. Carvell, but when I got out there, I heard there were some wounded where a Huey couldn't get in."

Hadfield and another LOH flying as an artillery observer volunteered to fly medevac.

A string of Blue Ghost Cobra gunships, F Troop, 8th Cav., flew along to provide overhead security.

ALONE in his craft, Hadfield flew into the tiny landing zone five times for the wounded.

"There was some incoming," recalled Hadfield with considerable understatement. "They'd put on two or three wounded at a time while I was hovering. I guess I picked up 10 or 15 men total."

Some soldiers on the LZ pointed the incoming. Each time a chopper came in it had 14 seconds before a mortar round followed.

"OLD 600"

(signal smoke) to guide us in," said Gregory.

"SMOKE would give the NVA an aiming point for their mortars, and we couldn't give them that much time. Sometimes I came in at low level, 100 knots per hour, and people on the ground would give me hand signals.

"But then I flew over an enemy machinegun when I was returning with a load of wounded. A round hit the fuselage and we went down." The chopper fell into a small PF camp northwest of Tam Ky.

"It was like a dead-stick landing," said Gregory. No one was hurt.

The crew unloaded the wounded and stayed all night with the friendly unit.

Their luck held. None of the infantrymen were critically wounded, and they were able to leave the next day on another chopper. "Old 600" was retrieved later and repaired.

"YOU can get a good idea of how a mission is executed by looking over a mission sheet," said Sp4 Charles Harris, (Macclesfield, N.C.), crew medic. Mission sheets are submitted by the aircraft commander after each flight. Information requested includes one entry for "Type of fire received."

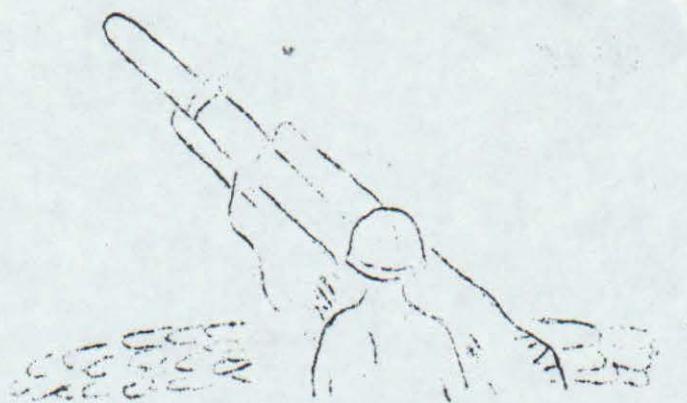
"One pilot just wrote 'Kitchen Sink,'" laughed Harris. "He was hit by everything."

When they aren't in the air, the crew cools it at Hawk Hill. They sleep in a hootch beside a medical company and park Old 600 a handy 20 yards from their doorway.

PFC Thomas Day (Canby, Ore.), is the crew chief. He makes minor repairs and oils up the machinery between flights. Recently, a hostile bullet burrowed into the floor of the chopper about a foot from where Day crouched to return fire.

"The ship was hit in the same place once before," noted Day. "I'm going to try another seat." *****

196th Liaison Team Calls In Bullseye



PFC Rich Campbell

LZ Hawk Hill***Rapid coordination between a 196th liaison team and a 155 Howitzer battery several miles away brought a crippling barrage of fire upon an NVA company, killing 17 enemy and wounding numerous others.

The liaison team, sent from 2-1, is permanently stationed at a Vietnamese PF outpost north of Tam Ky. The team's purpose is to give military advice and to call for indirect fire support. On this evening the four-man team performed with precision.

"It was about dusk when suddenly the PF leader ran over to me shouting NVA - NVA," recalled Sgt. Ken Abbey (Walbridge, Ohio), liaison teamleader. "A PF patrol had spotted more than 100 NVA with AK-47s and packs moving toward the south."

"When we received the call for fire, we weren't sure whether we could shoot that far," recalled 1LT Roderick Dexter (Birmingham, Ala.), fire direction center officer for Btry. A, 3-16. "The grid was right on our maximum

3-21 Scores 18

LZ Center***Soldiers of the 196th recently brought down 18 NVA in two explosive firefights northwest of Tam Ky.

In the early evening hours a patrol from Co. B, 3-21, was returning to its night laager position. As the infantrymen walked into a clearing the point man spotted a group of NVA 500 meters away. The Americans opened up with M-16 fire, killing four of the enemy.

Shortly after nightfall 82mm

range, but we got two guns ready and processed the data.

In several minutes, the mighty 155's had rounds on the way and the liaison team was in position to observe and adjust them on the moving enemy company.

"Before we knew it the artillery rounds were landing," reported Abbey, and after only one adjustment they were right on the money. We didn't know right then exactly what the results were, but we were certain the NVA had suffered heavy casualties."

A PF patrol the following morning confirmed the 17 kills. Villagers in the area said also that there were many others wounded who were carried away by the remaining NVA. Numerous blood trails and discarded medical bandages were discovered all over the area.

"The PF's were quick to show me on the map exactly where the NVA were," Abbey remembered. "Their quickness and artillery's accuracy made my job easy."

mortar rounds began impacting around Co. B's position. Artillery was immediately called in from Btry. B, 3-82, and the 105mm shells soon silenced the enemy mortar position.

"There must have been a lot of them out there," said Sp4 Mike Newman (Sturgis, Mich.), "but they got it too."

Sweeping the area the next morning, the infantrymen found six NVA killed by artillery. And this was not all. A week later Co. A, 3-21, was sweeping the area of Co. B's contact. They found the graves of eight more.

16 DAYS IN RETROSPECT

Sp5 Richard Merritt

LZ Hawk Hill***When they moved back to LZ Center for guard duty, Co. A, 3-21, had been humping for 16 days.

Seventy percent of those tired men never saw Hiep Duc in May, the last big fight for Alpha, but those who did know more about combat than they might be willing to admit. Those 16 days brought together the old and the new--the veterans and the "greenseeds"--and built something that Alpha could count on.

Sp4 Steve Hoadley (Plainfield, Ind.), who shoots a grenade launcher, can tell how it was in Hiep Duc. He and his squad outran an NVA mortar barrage.

"My squad was separated from the company," said Hoadley, "and the mortars were hitting close. But they were real slow adjusting their fire. We could tell where the next round would hit by watching. Then we'd run about 50 yards up the trail to get out of range. Nobody was ever hit."

The Americal Div. soldiers struck back, killed a .51 cal. machinegun crew and took the gun. A confirmed 19 enemy were killed; one was the battalion commander.

After Hiep Duc, some of the veteran enlisted men in the company left for home or got jobs in the rear. But new people came in, and most of the old platoon sergeants were still there to lead them. The executive officer led patrols for a week before a commander was found.

For Capt. Ronald Zola (Hazleton, Pa.), formerly intelligence officer for the battalion, it was a long-delayed reunion. When the spare, blond officer left his staff post and walked out to meet his company, they were on guard at LZ Center. Less than six months before he had commanded the 1st Plat.

"The company was mature," said Capt. Zola. "They had time to breathe. That's how I handle a company. I want to be prepared, and I never rush anything."

Just doing their job shouldn't



be too hard for an experienced unit. In mid-June Alpha was encamped south of a 196th fire base west of Tam Ky City. An order came over the radio. An American company was under attack and needed help. Capt. Zola informed his men, and they packed their equipment to move the two miles to the fight.

"I make it a habit to consult platoon leaders and sergeants on the right route to take," says Zola. "They've been here a long time, and they know the area. But my decision is the final one of course."

Zola stationed a platoon at their laager and split the other two platoons when they neared the trapped company. The 1st Plat. mounted a small ridge overlooking the battle.

"As soon as incoming rounds hit us the men immediately returned fire," said Capt. Zola. "I'm proud of them. Nobody froze."

The 3rd Plat. reached the embattled company and the two units moved back to the 1st Plat., which had called in artillery on the enemy left in the valley.

That night both companies had to march the two miles back to where the 2nd Plat. was waiting. The pointman was a platoon sergeant who volunteered because he

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RE-CHARGER

LZ Hawk Hill**Company D, 1-46, spent almost three months in the bush, going with the fighting from Hau Duc to Hiep Duc with no break except 12 days of bunker guard duty on LZ Professional.

The war is forgotten now for a few days, or at least pushed to the rear of each man's mind and kept submerged there by live entertainment, cold beer, and plenty of sleep.

Delta Company is in Chu Lai on re-charger--the field soldier's reward for doing the real fighting of the war--and the company is lucky. Because of a break in scheduling, it gets four days of rest before returning to the field--most companies get three.

And though brief, the days of re-charger are important to the men. Delta's company commander, 1st Lt. Thomas Crane (Bayville, N.Y.), explained: "Really, re-charger is about all an infantryman has to look forward to, except R&R and, of course, DEROs."

For most of the men, re-charger means release. "That's the best part," said Sp4 Ralph Allen (Nevada, Mo.). "You're free---there's no hassle. And there's no worry about getting shot at."

PFC Larry Stratton (Grand Blanc, Mich.) considered re-charger from another perspective: "It's the closest you (an infantryman) can be to living in the rear."

"It's just a change from the bush," added Sgt. Ronnie Eaton (Vincent, Ohio). "It must be good the way everybody looks forward to it."

What there is to look forward to cannot really be understood by

Sgt. Bob Nordyke

a casual onlooker. It requires a man from the field to appreciate the small things that re-charger offers.

Like a clean set of fatigues, or a shower every day, sometimes with hot water, or a bed with a mattress, or spending the whole night without pulling guard, or three (count 'em) hot meals a day.

Re-charger begins with an airlift of the company to Chu Lai by giant CH-47 Chinook helicopters, then on to the 196th recharger area located next to the beach.

Priority one is locking up all weapons and ammo--they are not needed. The men are given a place to sleep and a quick briefing before being set loose.

Capt. Eugene Shurtz (Davenport, Iowa), officer in charge of the area, has the unenviable job of keeping the restless soldiers in the theater bleachers for a twenty-minute talk.

The session consists of Capt. Shurtz explaining where all facilities are located, beach safety, uniform requirements ("..It's up to your CO what you can wear in the area."), no hard liquor allowed, what floor shows have been contracted, and ends with a quiet plea of let yourself go,

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CHARGERS COMPANY

12333333

1900

1863

196th TOTALS JULY 1-31, 1970			
	TOTAL	LEADING UNIT	
VC KILLED	113	3-21	51
NVA KILLED	84	1-46	54
TOTAL	197	3-21	81
WEAPONS CAPT.	91	1-46	39
RICE CAPT.	19,122 lbs.	4-31	8,000

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LOH

reviewed his experiences.

"The only time I was hit, it was so small I didn't know about it until the end of the day," said Merchant. Another pilot, CWO Carlos Quintero (Tampa, Fla.), received hits in his aircraft on three consecutive days but still flies the same airways.

It looks as if the ubiquitous Cayuse will share a larger and larger slice of the support action--all the support action. A door gunner who fought on Barrier Island, capsuled their ultimate mission aptly: "It was us or them."

16 DAYS

knew the region.

A week later Alpha came back to the battalion fire base for four days of perimeter guard.

There are always some men who hum onto Center but don't leave it after the guard days are over. Some fly to a larger headquarters for dentistry work, records checks or any of a thousand tasks that cannot be resolved in the field. One tall radioman with a ruddy face and a college degree in music faced a somewhat puzzling duty.

"I'm going back to the rear to get a Bronze Star," he explained as he waited for a chopper. "But I don't know what it's for."

RE-CHARGE

but within reason.

Then for a few days, the men are free to simply enjoy themselves as much as they can.

No part of Re-charger is fancy or luxurious, but there is much to enjoy.

There is the beach by the day and floor shows and movies at night, the nearest thing to a real female the men will see in a long time.

The food is some of the best

in Vietnam, especially after weeks of C-rations. Two afternoons are devoted to steak bar-b-ques, and there is always plenty to drink.

Other diversions for the men include MARs and Red Cross telephones to call home, a tape library and tape dubbing facilities, chapel services, and the beach.

If needed, the days of re-charger can be used to handle any administrative paperwork at Division headquarters, dental work, or just getting to the PX.

But mostly, the men just sit around and rest, quietly talking about anything but Vietnam, playing cards, getting a tan, and wishing for once that time would go slower.

Asked what more re-charger could offer, PFC Jack Ketner replied, "...just longer and more often." From most soldiers, the question quickly prompted a different reply--female companionship.

FREE
RV